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ABSTRACT

When researcher and teacher are united in a common goal of increased understanding, it is a mutally dependent and mutually beneficial endeavour. This paper reports on the methodology used in a recent classroom investigation of teachers' expressed beliefs in which each of the two participating teachers was engaged as co-researcher involved in the design, conduct, and interpretation of the work. The study, built on the principles of mutual adaptation, exemplifies Hunt's (1987) notions of reflexivity, responsiveness, and reciprocality, and reflects an understanding of teaching as experienced and articulated by the two teacher/co-investigators. Information was gathered using the ethnographic techniques of participation, observation, and interview-discussion, and documented in the form of field notes, audiotapes, written teacher statements and reflections, and written researcher reflections. The distinctive feature of the methodology and the theme of this paper is the feedback component of "descriptive summaries" which transformed the research process into a cycle of experiential learning. I use an example of a descriptive summary to illustrate the essentiality of ongoing feedback in research to inform, guide, and benefit the researcher, the practitioner, and the research itself. (Author)

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Sharing Professional Savvy for Mutual Purpose: Researcher and Teacher Join Hands

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Running head: PROFESSIONAL SAVVY

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Abstract

When researcher and teacher are united in a common goal of increased understanding, it is a mutually dependent and mutually beneficial endeavour. In this paper I will report on the methodology used in a recent classroom investigation of teachers' expressed beliefs in which each of the two participating teachers was engaged as co-researcher involved in the design, conduct, and interpretation of the work. The study, built on the principles of mutual adaptation, exemplifies Hunt's (1987) notions of reflexivity, responsiveness, and reciprocality, and reflects an understanding of teaching as experienced and articulated by the two teacher/co-investigators. Information was gathered using the ethnographic techniques of participation, observation, and interview-discussion, and documented in the form of field notes, audiotapes, written teacher statements and reflections, and written researcher reflections. The distinctive feature of the methodology and the theme of this paper is the feedback component of descriptive summaries which transformed the research process into a cycle of experiential learning. I use an example of a descriptive summary to illustrate the essentiality of ongoing feedback in research to inform, guide, and benefit the researcher, the practitioner, and the research itself.

Sharing Professional Savvy for Mutual Purpose:

Researcher and Teacher Join Hands[1]

Most of what we know about what goes on in classrooms we have learned through empirical-analytic research methods, methods associated with what Schon (1983) calls the model of technical rationality. The enduring rift between theory/research and practice that has become all too familiar to both researchers and practitioners is evidence of the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of this approach to the study of classroom life. Over the past two decades, though, there has been a gradual but significant shift in research perspective. Many researchers, discontented with the existing gap, have adopted a more intimate approach divesting themselves of conventional scientific means to move inside classrooms to observe, participate, and discuss classroom phenomena with those who know it best -- the teachers and students.

There has been a gradual progress along a continuum from what Hunt (1979, 1987) calls UFO research -- unilateral, fixed, objective -- to research built on the principles of the New 3 R's -- reflexivity, responsiveness, and reciprocality. Beginning with the traditional empirical-analytic perspective as a purely "outside-in" approach, one can trace a forward and inward trend to the current "inside-out" approach of collaborative or mutual adaptation research (Hunt, 1987). Educational ethnography is on the rise and educational researchers are, more and more, examining classroom issues within their context "admit[ting] the subjective experiences of both investigator and participants into the research frame, thus providing a depth of understanding often lacking

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[1]Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 1988.

in other approaches in research" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 9). Using the anthropological research methods of participation, observation, and interview, educational ethnographers gather "rich descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings" (ibid, p. 17), and report their findings with sensitivity to the world view of the participants. Some of the recent research on teacher thinking (see for example, some of the personal practical knowledge studies conducted by Clandinin & Connelly (1984, 1986, in press), and the professional knowledge research carried out by Russell & Munby (1986, 1987) has been part of this paradigm shift. This research on teacher thinking has been recast as research on teacher practice, an expression of teacher knowledge, thus initiating a whole new focus of inquiry.

Educational researchers are beginning to renounce exclusive rights to classroom investigation, recognizing the importance of teacher involvement, and acknowledging the essentiality of partnership. Because teachers hold the knowledge and expertise that researchers seek to understand, classroom research is becoming more collaborative with researchers and teachers engaged as "vital partners" (Saphier, 1982). Mutual adaptation research engages the teacher not only as participant but also as co-investigator. This significant move forward in educational research is one that holds promise for bridging the theory-practice gap. Unlike traditional "outside-in" research where researchers test hypotheses and formulate theories that do not easily translate into practice, collaborative research is a mutually beneficial, informative, and useful endeavour. The "good old days" of rating, classifying, and correlating, for reporting in reductionist quantitative language, observational classroom data gathered under laboratory or contrived conditions are beginning to give way to a new era of interpretive contextual inquiry into real life classroom situations

for purposes of understanding and describing the events as lived, and for directly informing practice. Indeed, the word "research" is taking on new meaning. Research is no longer solely an academic undertaking to produce a publishable document that is considered (primarily by fellow researchers and rarely by practitioners) to be a significant contribution to the field of inquiry. It is, rather, systematic inquiry into practice that stands to inform both at the academic or theoretical level and at the classroom or practical level. As Saphier (ibid) so eloquently states:

> We're not going to get anywhere anymore with correlation studies of isolated teacher behaviours and student outcomes. They served their purpose but their purpose is past. Researchers need the collaboration of teachers to steer clear of the trivial and increase the savvy and sophistication of their questions. Researchers.... need teachers to complicate their thinking appropriately and to inform their question asking. It is around forming these questions and around sorting through the existing knowledge base that teachers and researchers must come together. (p. 92)

Hunt (1987) conceptualizes this new researcher-practitioner partnership in a continuous transactional cycle. Each partner is characterized by the elements of perception, intention, and action, and engaged in transaction through a reciprocal feedback component; the feedback component and indeed, the research itself is further informed and enriched by the implicit theories of researcher and practitioner. The addition of these two elements and the reciprocality of the feedback component give the research its unique "inside-out" quality, and make even the interpretation a mutual endeavour that is a part of the research process.

Teachers and researchers working together on the design, conduct, and interpretation of information, share their professional savvy for the mutual purpose of understanding and describing classroom phenomena. Research designed and conducted in this way becomes an ongoing process of communication between

researcher and practitioner leading both to increased personal understanding. Sharing of expertise, duality of perspective, and mutuality in purpose and interpretation are the features that have given new meaning to the word, "research". And, when one considers the question, "Who is the research for?" the meaning of collaboration is better understood, and its importance more clearly felt. As Hopkins (1987) suggests, "The point to keep in mind is that research in applied subjects such as education should, irrespective of methodology, feed the knowledge base in theoretical and (italics added) practical terms, and encourage reflection and action on the part of practitioners." (p. 124).

The importance of collaboration in research was first formally acknowledged in 1946 when Kurt Lewin and colleagues began experimenting with the techniques of "action research". When a small group of trainees sat in on and were subsequently invited to contribute to the evening evaluation sessions, originally intended as reporting, reflection, and analysis sessions for the research team, the importance of participant involvement in research was discovered. These sessions, which quickly developed into active exchanges of ideas and perspectives, informed the research project to such an extent that one of the researchers (Lippitt, 1949) was prompted to describe them as, "among the most valuable training sessions of the workshop" (p. 114). The importance of collaboration is now being rediscovered in classroom research.

When teachers and researchers are partners in theory building the outcomes are profound for both. Researchers acquire substantial and accurate information on what really goes on in classrooms; and teachers increase and renew their personal and professional understanding. It is the research process itself, however, that holds such importance for it is the ongoing dialogue of reflection

and feedback that assists in the transformation of personal understandings into educational knowledge. In the words of Jean Rudduck (1987):

> The energy which fuels the act of collaborative interpretation comes from the sparking of the two perspectives: that of the insider, who has the intimate knowledge of the setting but whose eyes are dulled by routine reconstruction of events in their own image...; and that of the outsider, whose wares include ways of "seeing" and thinking about the events of the classroom which he or she has developed through broad experience of classrooms and through critical reflection on different conceptual frameworks for analyzing classrooms.... Thus, in a sense, the academic is moving into the pragmatic world of classroom knowledge-building, but bringing into it a perspective that strengthens the practitioner's framework for analysis. Each partner can learn from what the other has to offer. (p. 139)

It is from the dialectic that develops through the interaction of the differing perspectives of practitioner and researcher -- practical with theoretical, experienced with naive, routinized with fresh -- that meaning is reconstructed. Although each co-researcher is empowered to interpret action with the imposition of personally oriented structures, mutual negotiations and synthesis of perspective precludes such distortion, thus ensuring accuracy in interpretation.

In collaborative classroom research, sharing and development of ideas and understandings typically takes place through reflection and discussion organized around teaching events. In a recent classroom investigation I conducted in collaboration with two experienced classroom teachers, theory building was further facilitated by an additional feedback component that transformed the research into a continuous cycle of experiential learning. Research as experiential learning is another way of conceptualizing Hunt's model of mutual adaptation research. The experiential learning model, adapted by Kolb and Fry (1975) from the Lewinian model of action research and laboratory training, is useful for depicting the collaborative research process because it clearly highlights the feedback component which I believe to be the key to collaborative inquiry.

> The underlying insight of experiential learning is deceptively simple, namely that learning, change and growth are best facilitated by an integrated process that begins with (1) here-and-now experience followed by (2) collection of data and observations about that experience. The data are then (3) analyzed and the conclusions of this analysis are fed back to the actors in the experience for their use in the (4) modification of their behaviour and choice of new experiences. Learning is thus conceived as a four-stage cycle as shown in Figure 1. Immediate concrete experience is the basis for observation and reflection. These observations are assimilated into a "theory" from which new implications for action can be deduced. These implications or hypotheses then serve as guides in acting to create new experiences. (Kolb and Fry, 1975, p. 33-34).

Insert Figure 1 Here

Direct experience as a focal point gives meaning to abstraction and provides a reference point for testing and validation. Feedback provides the basis for ongoing goal-directed action and evaluation.

An Example of Research as Experiential Learning

I will describe the methodology I used in a classroom investigation of teachers' expressed beliefs as an example of collaborative research as experiential learning. The study, built on the principles of mutual adaptation, exemplifies Hunt's notions of reflexivity, responsiveness, and reciprocality, and reflects an understanding of teaching as experienced and articulated by the two teacher/co-investigators. Information was gathered using the ethnographic techniques of participation, observation, and interview-discussion, and documented in the form of field notes, audiotapes of classroom visits, audiotapes of teacher-researcher discussions, written post-field work reflections, and written pre-field work teacher statements and reflections. The distinctive feature of the methodology is the feedback component of descriptive summaries which, in addition to being part of the interpretive process,

facilitated information gathering. I will describe the nature and format of the descriptive summaries and elaborate on their essentiality to the interpretation of classroom practice, showing how they informed and guided the process of theory building, and reinforced the collaborative, non-evaluative nature of the work.

The Descriptive Summaries

The descriptive summaries, in the style of an informal first person narrative, were prepared weekly in the intervals between classroom visits and delivered to the teacher prior to each session. Each one included a summary of my most recent visit; a cumulative interpretation, based on all that we had uncovered to date, of the teacher's practice; examples, from the field notes and discussion transcripts, to support the interpretations; any ideas and insights I wanted to further explore in our next session; and my reflections on our work and progress. The summaries were given to the teacher before our next scheduled session to provide an opportunity for the teacher to read and assimilate the material; and to formulate questions, comments, and reactions for the next session. Our discussion each week began with the teacher's responses to and comments on the summary.

Initially, the descriptive summaries were intended to provide the teachers with an ongoing account of our progress and, through the teachers' responses, to guide my interpretations of their practice. It became readily apparent, though, that their function extended well beyond these initial purposes. The summaries were instrumental in establishing and maintaining rapport because they reinforced the collaborative nature of the work, and reaffirmed my earlier commitment to a non-evaluative perspective. Mutuality was made explicit as the teachers were encouraged to verify or refute my interpretations, and to use the

summaries to assess the research proceedings, and to suggest modifications. Because the preparation of each summary necessitated considerable reflection and synthesis of information, each weekly analysis generated insights, ideas, and questions which organized my observations, stimulated the teachers' reflections, and provided a basis for dialogue. In this way the descriptive summaries kept the experiential research cycle in motion, guiding our research and aiding in the process of theory articulation.

I have selected some excerpts from one descriptive summary to illustrate how this feedback feature works. This summary was prepared at approximately the halfway point of my work with one teacher.

A Descriptive Summary

> The highlight of my visit this week came when you gave me the statements about your teaching you had written prior to our beginning this project. You mentioned earlier that my first summary had reminded you of your own statements about your teaching, but I had no idea that the similarities were so strong. Since my visit I have spent considerable time reading and reflecting on your comments, your metaphor of teaching, and the conclusions you drew from other reflections on your work. As I did, my excitement and delight grew. I wasn't so surprised that I was able to see in your practice much of what you stated as being important to you because your beliefs are expressed in your actions; but what I did find so remarkable was the language we were using to describe your practice. As I looked back at my earlier summaries and the notes I had written after our sessions together I was struck by the **likeness of our descriptions**, even to our choice of words. As I mentioned, since the beginning I have been mulling over my perceptions of your **teaching as a service to the students**. The impression was strong but I wasn't able to define it clearly in my own mind so I had not as yet shared it with you. Needless to say, I felt encouraged and reassured when I read your metaphor and was able to finally make the clarification. I **think that this congruency in interpretation is significant because it so clearly illustrates the dialectic existing between your thoughts and your actions**. I feel that we are converging on information that will be helpful as we attempt to describe your spontaneous actions; therefore, I would like to focus on your theory of teaching as you articulated it and as I observed it, and try to work through some ideas.
>
> When you made explicit your theories of teaching you reflected on your practice and put words on the thoughts and images arising from this reflection. You described your teaching both conceptually and metaphorically. This metaphorical description represents your image of

teaching both as it is and as you want it to be. Because these thoughts originated with your practice, it is probably safe to say that you strive (though perhaps not consciously) to maintain that image as you interact with your students and your environment. When something happens to distort, interfere with, or in some way disrupt the expression of that image you modify and adapt your environment to restore its equanimity. I studied your statements and then looked back at my observation notes and our discussions and extracted instances of your teaching which I feel best illustrate the ideas I want to present and explore....

I hope these few examples allow you to grasp my line of thinking so far. Now, I would like to take this a step further and explore the **notion of a signal, as a nexus of your theory and practice, that enables you to preserve your image and express your beliefs.** Your theory comprises many elements relating to the many aspects of your practice -- cognitive, social, psychological, spiritual, and so on. The expression of these elements in practice varies with the demand that is made known to you as you "read" your environment. You also have available a vast resource of knowledge -- theoretical, practical, personal, psychological, spiritual, and so on -- that allows you to "flex" to these demands. As you interact with your students you maintain or change your approach spontaneously. You know when something is going well or that you are responding appropriately, and you know when you have to make a change. Something tells you when to change or maintain your current approach; I like the idea of calling that something your signal. This concept may seem rather elusive but I think we can pursue it through your metaphor....

You have definite ideas about what is right for you and your students. You have articulated them in your statement of your beliefs about teaching. Your experienced knowledge gives you the know-how to consistently express your theory in practice, but because of the very nature of the profession you are constantly having to adapt and modify to meet both the demands of the students and the standards set by your own belief system. It isn't a clear-cut case of design and implementation. My notion is that tied in with your implicit theory is an implicit signal that tells you <u>when</u> to "read", <u>when</u> to "flex", and <u>when</u> there isn't a need for further adaptation.

I am eager to hear your reaction to the ideas I have presented. I hope I've expressed them with sufficient clarity. I know that much of what we are dealing with is nebulous, difficult to grasp and hold onto but perhaps now that I've introduced these thoughts we can work them through in an attempt at clearer understanding. I look forward with interest to our next discussion hoping for more insights into your practice and further refinement of the notion of your signal.

In the next session my observations, the teacher's introspection, and our discussion were organized around the ideas presented in this summary. The

information collected in this next session was analyzed in a similar way but with a different organizing theme. In this way we worked together toward an interpretation of teaching actions as expressions of teaching beliefs.

Conceptualizing this process in terms of the experiential learning cycle one can see how the feedback component can inform and guide the research. In this example, instances of teaching action recorded in observation notes and audiotapes, written comments, discussion transcripts, and field notes constituted the experiential data. Reflection and synthesis led to a discovery of congruency in interpretation, and to the formulation of a theory about the theory-practice dialectic as illustrated through metaphor, and of the signal as a nexus of theory and practice. These hypotheses focused our attention for further exploration and refinement in the next session. The cyclical feeding back of interpretation throughout the field work represented first formal steps to a second phase of post-field work analysis. In phase one we were able to establish numerous entry points to further exploration; for my further exploration at a deeper, more abstract and theoretical level, and for the teachers' further exploration when time and opportunity would permit.

Collaborative research brings together, in a more or less intimate manner, two professionals who for an indefinite period of time co-exist in close association sharing their expertise for the mutual purpose of increased understanding. The relationship between practitioner and researcher is symbiotic -- interdependent and mutually beneficial. When we conceptualize research as a process of experiential learning we make evident the need for four different kinds or levels of involvement: practical involvement for the generation of concrete experiences, observation and reflection on experience from different perspectives, abstraction and integration of ideas into logical theories, and

testing of ideas and action plans. When we consider the diversity of the worlds of teacher and researcher (one practical, the other theoretical) and their contrastive orientations (one concrete, the other abstract), it is easy to understand how the theory-practice gap was created and remains unbridged. Researchers and teachers must come together to share strengths, abilities, and orientations because each has an essential contribution to make at the different phases of the research cycle.

Mutual Dependence

Each partner in the inquiry contributes differently; together they are able to achieve their goal. In addition to the obvious time and practical commitment requirements, researchers need teachers to inform their observations. Teachers know their classroom practice from the inside; researchers are outsiders. Without the teacher's informed view many claims about what goes on in classrooms can only be made on the basis of surface analysis or speculation. Once informed by the insider's view it becomes evident to a researcher that the symbolic realm of action is one of depth, multiplicity, and interiority and not capable of being understood through a purely visual analogue. (Sardello, 1976, p. 120).

Teachers need researchers too. An argument for the value of reflection would be axiomatic; but, noting that the time and opportunity required for reflection is seldom afforded classroom teachers is worthwhile. In collaborative research, it is part of the research commitment. Making explicit one's thoughts, beliefs, and theories about teaching is a personally and professionally enlightening experience and yet, this too is something in which few teachers have the opportunity to engage. For classroom practitioners with vast storehouses of experienced knowledge the value of assistance and support in such

an endeavour is great. The outside perspective of the researcher should not go unmentioned. As one teacher says,

> It's a hand in hand kind of approach. See, my interpretations aren't necessarily going to be correct either. I might be able to tell you reasons for certain actions but it isn't necessarily right. It could be one-sided also. The teacher also needs some objectivity and independence from the [action]. (Cole, 1987)

And of course, the researcher's skills in synthesis and analysis are invaluable tools.

Mutual Benefit

Traditional classroom research is typically conducted for researchers. Projects are designed, data gathered and analyzed, and reports written. Teachers as research "subjects" receive little consideration and derive little real benefit. Collaborative research, however, benefits both researcher and practitioner. As with the traditional approach, the researcher finds answers to research questions; but, because the answers are more informed by context, they more accurately describe the phenomenon under investigation. More importantly though, collaborative research is for practitioners too. For teachers, having the time and opportunity to reflect on practice; receiving encouragement and assistance in the explication of implicit beliefs and help in understanding how these beliefs are played out in practice, and assistance in establishing a system of communication that has personal and practical meaning; and obtaining feedback from a neutral observer are useful and beneficial experiences. Some comments from a teacher/co-investigator in this study will illustrate.

> I think it's been a very valuable experience.... It's given me renewed confidence in my teaching and I appreciate that. I think a lot of it has been because you've been very encouraging, very positive. It has to do with your style I suppose.... You looked specifically for items relating to the study and chose to ignore or not comment on negative things, and I think that has made the experience much more palatable for me. It made me less defensive and less afraid....It's much closer scrutiny than a teacher normally has. Staying on track looking for specific things has made it a positive thing.... I came

away feeling better about my teaching and I also think I had a better understanding of some of the processes that go on in my teaching. I think it helped you too. I think this kind of research has to go on because it takes place in the actual context. You paid attention to context and I think that's very important in research. It's the kind that should yield useful information.

In looking over some of the summaries of your visits I'd say, "Oh, yeah, I am accomplishing many of the things I want to accomplish." An outsider can sometimes see that better than you can when you're in the middle of it. I've found it to be an encouraging experience and I've been feeling better about my teaching than I did before you came so that's good.

I'm finding it kind of helpful to have someone take such a close look and mention things. I guess I find it encouraging that you see some of my ideas in practice because I'm not always so sure that they're coming through.

I think I have a deeper awareness of what's going on when I'm teaching now. By having isolated certain aspects of what's going on in the classroom, laid them on the table looking at them more closely, I think it's deepened my awareness of what's going on when I put it back into that integral whole.

When researcher and teacher join hands to work in synergistic association toward a common goal research and practice are no longer two distinct entities. The success of a collaborative research endeavour, however, is contingent upon attention to several factors. Adherence to the characteristics of reflexivity, responsiveness, and reciprocality are fundamental. Trust and openness developed and maintained in a rapport building process are certainly key in any collaborative work. Time and opportunity for reflection, and mutuality and support in theory articulation cannot be overstated. But the essence of collaborative research is, like the essence of experiential learning, ongoing feedback.

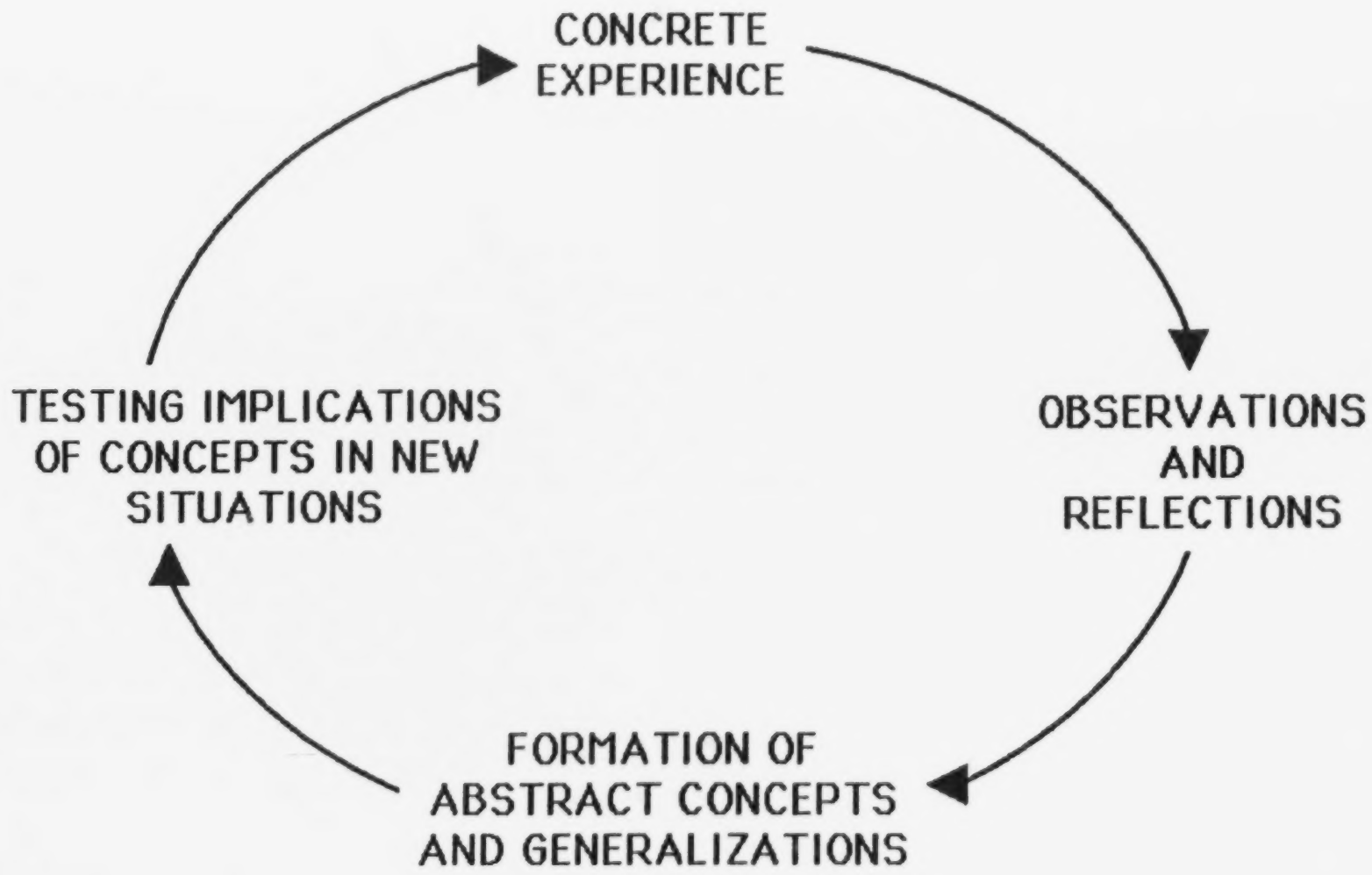
CONCRETE EXPERIENCE
OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS
FORMATION OF ABSTRACT CONCEPTS AND GENERALIZATIONS
TESTING IMPLICATIONS OF CONCEPTS IN NEW SITUATIONS

FIGURE 1

THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL

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